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Religion
Saturday, Jan. 22, 1994 ■ Abilene Reporter-News SECTION B

Earthquake relief

Church notes

'Old Roots, New Fruits' theme for Epiphany meet

By ROY A. JONES II
Religion Editor

Church of the Heavenly Rest Episcopal, 602 Meander, will hold its annual Epiphany Preaching Mission, Tuesday through Thursday.

Guest speaker will be the Very Rev. Durstan R. McDonald, dean of the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. He has headed the Austin seminary since 1984.

McDonald

Theme of the preaching mission is "Old Roots, New Fruits," said the Rev. Rodney Quainton, rector.

McDonald will speak from 7:15 to 8 nightly. His topics will be "The Life of Prayer" on Tuesday, "Christian Spirituality" on Wednesday and "Asceticism and the Christian Life" on Thursday.

The church will sponsor a meal in the Parish Hall at 6:15 nightly, and vespers will begin at 7 p.m. in the nave. Child care will be provided.

Reservations for the meals are required by noon each day by calling 677-2091. Wednesday will be the annual Brotherhood Chili Night.

In addition to being dean of the Austin seminary, McDonald also lectures in theology and Christian ethics. He completed his undergraduate degrees at Trinity College, Hartford, Conn., and won Phi Betta Kappa scholastic honors.

At Philadelphia Divinity School he earned another theology degree, plus the faculty prize for the highest three-year average.

He earned his doctor of philosophy degree in religion from the University of Pennsylvania in 1967. He also received a doctor of divinity degree from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, N.Y., in 1979.

He taught at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, The General Theological Seminary of New York City, and from 1977-83 was director of the prestigious Trinity Institute in New York City.

He has served on many national boards including the Standing Committee on the Structure of the Church, Archives of the Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Theological Review.

Grace Lutheran turns 40

Grace Lutheran Church, 1202 S. Pioneer, Abilene's first and only Evangelical Lutheran Church of America congregation, celebrates its 40th anniversary this weekend.

Organized in a funeral home with 34 charter members, the congregation grew to 385 in five years. It now has more than 300 members.

Bishop Mark Herbeger of the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod will be the speaker for the anniversary banquet at the church at 7:30 tonight. Herbener will also preach at the 9:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday.

The founding pastor, the Rev. Clarence C. Ehler will be among the former pastors returning for the celebration. He will outline the church history tonight.

Ehler

Ehler came from Wilson, Tex., to organize the Abilene church in 1954 and served until 1959. He later pastored in Kerrville and organized another Grace Lutheran Church, this one in Bandera. He also pastored in Moulton and Witting.

Ehler "retired" in 1991 after more than 40 years in the active ministry, but continues to serve as interim pastor of a church in Fayetteville, Tex. He and his wife, Faye, live near LaGrange on land his family homesteaded in 1893.

Other former pastors slated to participate are the Rev. Mel Swoyer, who later pastored Faith Lutheran Church in Sagerton before moving to his present assignment in Lubbock, and the Rev. Robert Hurlbut, now a pastoral counselor in Minneapolis, Minn.

Grace's building was completed in November 1954 with members doing most of the labor themselves. Education wings had to be added in 1958 and 1960. The Rev. Arthur Lowe has been pastor since 1989.

Oliphant anniversary

Macedonia Baptist Church, 608 N. 7th, will honor its pastor and wife Sunday in recognition of the Rev. T.G. Oliphant's 50th year in the gospel ministry.

Oliphant has pastored the Macedonia congregation for 28 years. He led the construction of the present church building, which was dedicated in 1990.

Oliphant

Earlier in his career he pastored four Big Country churches: True Vine Baptist Church in Coleman for four years, Little Flock Baptist Church in Eastland for seven years, Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranger for nine years and Bethel Baptist Church in Breckenridge for four years.

He and his wife, Una, returned to Abilene in 1965 so that their children could attend the old Woodson High School.

Oliphant was a founder of the Taylor County chapter of the NAACP and has been its president twice. He also was the first of his race to be elected president of the Abilene Ministerial Alliance, in 1972.

Sunday's appreciation service will begin at 3 p.m. at the church. A longtime friend of Oliphant, the Rev. W.O. Everett, will preach. He is pastor of Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church in Wichita Falls.

Choirs from Pilgrim Rest, New Light Baptist Church, and the host church will sing.

Lunch will be served at 1:15 p.m., following the morning worship service. Oliphant will preach at that service.

Richard Ross here

Richard Ross, organizer of the popular "True Love Waits" campaign, is leading a conference for area youth ministers and workers through today at Hardin-Simmons University.

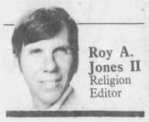
Now a youth minister consultant with the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn., Ross is an HSU graduate and former youth minister at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.

He has attracted national media attention in the past year since "True Love Waits" has spread to many other denominations and several other countries. The campaign urges teens to abstain from sex until marriage.

The Abilene Baptist Association is sponsoring the weekend seminar at HSU's Logsdon School of Theology.

Ross met with full-time youth ministers Friday, and will have sessions with youth workers and lay and part-time youth leaders from 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. today.

Don't call for Cotton Bridges; he's gone to help in California


Roy A. Jones II
Religion Editor

When David Bridges first heard about the giant California earthquake he knew *where* his dad's next mission of mercy would be.

"I just didn't know if he'd lead the first group or the second one," the Abilene photographer said.

Bridges' father is Marion E. Bridges, better known to most folks as Cotton Bridges. The 1959 Hardin-Simmons University graduate and former longtime Abilene banker now lives in Plano.

Cotton's full-time job is state director of Royal Ambassadors, a boys' mission organization sponsored by Texas Baptist Men. But as one of only three full-time employees of Texas Baptist Men, he has some significant "additional duties," especially when it comes to disasters.

Bridges

He helps train volunteers for disaster relief and coordinates efforts in providing prompt assistance to disaster victims. The Dallas TBM office maintains a list of about 600 volunteers around the state who can be called when disasters strike.

And Cotton is certainly not one to ask volunteers to do what he would not do himself. That's why he's been on the scene of most major disasters — hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes — ministering to victims while the wounds were still fresh.

When the TBM's Disaster Relief Mobile Unit, a specially-equipped, 18-wheel, tractor-trailer rig, made a pit stop at Tye enroute to California on Tuesday, David Bridges figured there was a 50-50 chance his father was aboard.

This time, however, it was Cotton's co-worker, John LaNoue, director of Baptist Young Men for TBM, leading the 10 volunteers. LaNoue said he left Bridges behind rounding up more volunteers for the "child support unit" that will complement the work of the relief unit.

A call to the TBM office Wednesday yielded the anticipated response: "No, Cotton's not here. He's gone to California."

While he's become quite adept at helping volunteers prepare the 35,000 meals which the TBM relief mobile unit can serve *daily*, Cotton is more at ease heading up the "child support" unit.

It was a love for children and a desire to help them become involved in missions that led him to quit his job as an Abilene bank vice president — after 21 years — to join the recreation ministry staff of First Baptist Church's Family Life Center back in the early 1980s.

Increased volunteer involvement in the statewide Royal Ambassadors and Texas Baptist Men organizations eventually led to an invitation to join the TBM's staff four years ago.

Since 1967, the Texas Baptist Men have mopped up after nearly 40 disasters, so Cotton knew what he was getting into. In fact, it was working as a volunteer with TBM units which helped at the Albany flood in 1978 and the Wichita Falls tornado in 1979 that kindled his desire to help disaster victims.

As an "additional duty," he heads up the TBM's Temporary Emergency Child Care program, which has been approved by the Department of Human Resources as a licensed child care center in disasters.

The unit is mobilized during the recovery phase of a natural disaster — usually several days after the relief mobile unit has begun its work. Bridges and his volunteers give the children a hot, balanced meal at noon while providing parents time to clean up their homes or businesses and file claims for emergency assistance, low-interest loans and insurance.

And Cotton's volunteers aren't just baby-sitters. He has trained each volunteer to use instructional modules carefully developed to help children cope with the trauma they have experienced.

Cotton likes to brag that one of the most popular toys in the unit is a set of cardboard, brick-colored blocks donated several years ago by his granddaughter, Rebecca Bridges.

David Bridges said his daughter, now 9, came up with the gift herself after she heard "Grandpa" describe the joy of seeing children who'd lost everything momentarily forget their troubles while engrossed in play.

"He always says being able to give something back to the little kids who have lost everything they knew is what motivates him," David said. "And, of course, we believe that it is our duty as Christians to minister to 'the least of these.'"

During his brief stop in Tye, LaNoue said it was Cotton Bridges who pulled together the volunteers and mobile kitchens that the TBM sent to Iran in 1992 to feed starving Kurdish refugees displaced by the Persian Gulf War. LaNoue was the on-site director for that one-month project, too, but he said it couldn't have been accomplished without Bridges' expertise.

Cotton later led TBM's six-week effort in Louisiana after Hurricane Andrew. A United Methodist Volunteers in Mission team headed up by Kim Pesse of Rotan was among other church groups which helped in the cleanup and rebuilding of Louisiana churches and homes.

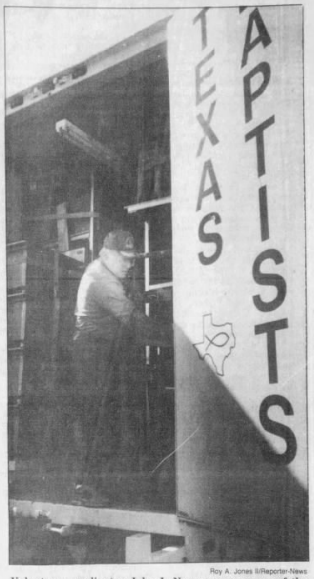
During the brief stop in Tye, John Lilley, a retired IBM employee who worked in the space program at Houston for 19 years, explained what motivates him to leave suddenly for California. He had to leave his wife to care for some valuable, newly-hatched, emu chicks she knows nothing about, he winced.

"She's on this trip as much as I am," he said. "It was a commitment for her, too."

"It would have been easy to beg off of making this trip, but I feel the Lord has asked me to go," he said. "Plus there's a real joy in ministering to people at a time of need."

David Bridges said the initial teams usually serve no longer than about 72 hours "because of the emotional strain of what they see and experience."

"Then Dad starts bringing in other volunteers for four and five days at a time," he said. "If you're not in decent shape (emotionally) yourself you can't help anybody else."



Roy A. Jones II/Reporter-News

Volunteer coordinator John LaNoue secures some of the equipment in the Texas Baptist Men's disaster relief mobile unit. The 18-wheel, tractor-trailer rig stopped in Tye Tuesday en route to California, where volunteers are now using its field kitchen to prepare 35,000 meals per day for earthquake victims.

'He always says being able to give something back to the little kids who have lost everything they knew is what motivates him.'
David Bridges

Blockbuster's head between 2 camps

By TERRY MATTINGLY
Scripps Howard News Service

On religion

H. Wayne Huizenga has read enough angry letters from elderly church people to know the major themes.

"You get these letters all the time and they say something like this: 'We don't even own a VCR and we don't even rent videos. But we want you to know that if we ever did, we would be sure never to visit your store,'" said the chief executive officer of Blockbuster Entertainment Corp.

"Let's be honest. Now that's a letter that isn't going to make a businessman worry very much."

His letters are typical of the way many moral conservatives lobby entertainment leaders. All too often, their efforts are uninformed and, in business terms, irrelevant. Thus, these letters have little impact.

Huizenga is the rare entertainment czar who reads them, in part because he attends a conservative church.

"It may take many more years for church people to wake up and deal with all of this," he said. "We may have to wait for a whole generation of clergy to pass away and leave the scene."

Ironically, in some Hollywood circles Huizenga is known as a troublemaker, or even a prude. After all, Blockbuster declines to stock Playboy videos or movies rated NC-17. Also, Huizenga has helped in efforts to rent tapes of the cleaned-up versions of PG-13 and R-rated movies used by airlines.

Blockbuster's CEO lives between two camps, but no one on either side doubts his clout. In recent weeks he made headlines with an $8.4 billion merger with Viacom Inc., creating a superpower with assets from MTV's Beavis and Butt-head to Blockbuster's 3,600 stores. Viacom and Blockbuster continue in the high-stakes bidding war for Paramount Communications.

Amid the takeover maneuvers, Huizenga returned to Grand Rapids, Mich., this week to lecture at Calvin College, where he briefly studied in the late 1950s. He sang the praises of traditional Midwestern values, but also issued a word of warning.

The marketplace, he said, is serving up new moral choices and the "information superhighway" — linking computers, television and entertainment media — will only speed things up. The church must offer a vision of media and popular culture that includes positive insights, as well as accurate criticisms. Complaints alone will be heard as whining and calls for censorship, he said.

"The church could have a powerful positive voice," said Huizenga, who grew up in a Dutch Calvinist home. "I have little doubt studio executives would hear that voice. Look at the numbers. A lot of people go to church and a lot of people care about their families. It would be in the best interests of entertainment people to hear those voices."

The market forces media entrepreneurs to make tough choices, he said. For example, many Christians write to complain that his stores carry "hard R," as well as "soft R," movies. Huizenga said he isn't proud of many of these tapes, but he has tried to help his critics understand the difficulty of making film-by-film judgment calls across a national chain of stores.

Blockbuster has tried to offer a family-friendly approach. Huizenga said that when he began studying the video business, many stores were dark, dingy, morally shady "holes in the wall" that offered many adult tapes. Progress has been made, he said.

But parents must realize that new media technologies will soon force them to make even more choices. The era of fiber optic cable and hundreds of visual media channels could be very good, or very bad, for family values.

"What impact is all of this entertainment going to have on our future generations? When technology offers people more choices they can either make more good choices or more bad choices," Huizenga said. "The 'information superhighway' may offer more movies and TV shows and information than we want our children to see.

"The jury is still out. Things could get better, or worse. Of course, it would help if the church did a better job helping our people make these kinds of choices."

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